

CRISIS RESPONSE K-9

Anchorage chaplain and her dog team up to comfort those in distress

COLLEGE HOOPS

UAA women get No. 2 seed in the NCAA West Region tourney

Final Edition



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It's official: Iditarod chase is on



Norwegian musher Tore Albrigtsen reacts to flags being waved as he leaves the start of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in Willow on Sunday. Photos by BILL ROTH / Alaska Dispatch News

An estimated 15,000 people gather around Willow Lake to send teams down the trail.

Zaz Hollander
Alaska Dispatch News

WILLOW — Martin Buser came down with pneumonia.

Wade Marrs got hit with the flu. As if running a team of sled dogs about 1,000 miles to Nome wasn't hard enough, two top contenders are taking on this year's Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race with the kind of crud that would lay most folks low for days.

Eighty-five mushers hit the trail Sunday on Willow Lake, site of the race's official start after the ceremonial start in Anchorage on Saturday.

A festive crowd sent them off — organizers expected at least 15,000 people — amid sunny weather and glimpses of Alaska Range peaks on the horizon. Fans lined the starting chute for more than a mile.

Mushers and their teams face a daunting trail ahead: icy and fast early to Skwentna with a confusion of braided trails on the Susitna River and rumors of blown-out ice bridges farther up at Dalzell Gorge.

But Buser and Marrs left the chute smiling and waving.

"It's March," Buser said a few hours before the race's 2 p.m. start. "Where am I gonna be in the beginning of March other than here?"

He chuckled and immediately fell victim to a brief but uncontrollable coughing fit.

Buser, the 57-year-old four-time race champion from Big Lake, has a reputation for bull-headed ferocity. He ran the 2005

See Page A-8, IDITAROD



Musher Wade Marrs cuts into a ribeye steak while waiting for the restart.

Duck farts and flamingos: Join the tailgate party!

Suzanna Caldwell
Alaska Dispatch News

Ask any musher preparing to head down the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race trail, and they'll tell you the 1,000-mile race is the Super Bowl of dog mushing.

And with this Super Bowl comes a tailgate party that stretches for miles.

"There are lots of shenanigans going on," said Willow resident Ed McCain as he settled in to a beach chair next to a section of trail beside Deshka Landing. "You can pick any kind of party you want."

It's a party that can come in many forms from the Willow Lake start well past the second checkpoint of Skwentna, 72 miles away. Expect everything from "K9 Fairies" dressed in glittery lace tutus to "Club Flamingo," a group that lines a section of trail with hundreds of pink flamingos. There are partygoers drinking Pabst Blue Ribbon and others imbibing handmade wine from Northern California. Some eat bonfire-grilled hot dogs while others warm up gourmet venison and elk chili.

See Page A-8, TAILGATE PARTY



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Murkowski mines energy industry for major campaign funds



Alaska senator's leadership positions help her collect cash for re-election.

Erica Martinson
Alaska Dispatch News

WASHINGTON — Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski is — financially speaking — ready for 2016.

Murkowski spent 2015 amassing a multimillion dollar, record-breaking war chest for her burgeoning third-term

campaign, thanks in no small part to her top-dog status in the high-dollar energy industry world of Washington, D.C.

In part, it's a lesson learned: the money she has now would have come in handy during her tumultuous 2010 election, when Murkowski scrambled to put together a write-in campaign to defeat Joe Miller, who took her spot on the Republican ticket after an upset win in the primary.

Just before the 2010 primary, she had just \$1.8 million on hand, while her main opponent had only \$84,200. Miller gained huge support from the Republican Party in

the weeks that followed, while Murkowski gathered quick cash from Native groups and the energy industry.

Elections have only become more expensive since then. Given that candidates and their supporters spent nearly \$20 million in Alaska's 2014 Senate race, it's a fair bet that Murkowski may need high stacks of cash this time around. So far there have been no "independent expenditures" in the Alaska Senate race, according to the Federal

See Page A-7, MURKOWSKI

Nancy Reagan, protector and wife of president, dies at 94

Former first lady remembered for her fierce devotion.

Nadine Skoczylas
Bloomberg News

Nancy Reagan, the former actress and first lady who nurtured the political career of her husband Ronald Reagan, was remembered for an unstinting devotion to the president and her efforts to battle drug abuse among youths and Alzheimer's disease.

Reagan's death on Sunday at age 94 was confirmed by the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library. The cause was congestive heart failure.

The Reagans were inseparable during their 52 years of marriage, and their deep mutual affection carried over into public life. Nancy Reagan encouraged a close personal relationship with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and his wife



GEORGE TAMES / New York Times archive 1981

First lady Nancy Reagan waves after the inauguration of her husband, President Ronald Reagan, in Washington on Jan. 20, 1981. Nancy Reagan, the stylish and influential wife of the 40th president who unabashedly put Ronald Reagan at the center of her life but who became a political figure in her own right, died Sunday at her home in Los Angeles.

Raisa during tense arms negotiations in the 1980s. She sometimes organized Reagan's schedule based on horoscope readings and caused a stir over White House renovations and pricey purchases.

"Nancy Reagan once wrote that nothing could prepare you for living in the White House," President Barack Obama said in a statement. "She was right, of course. But we had a head start, because we were fortunate to benefit from her proud example, and her warm and generous advice. We remain grateful for Nancy Reagan's life, thankful for her guidance, and prayerful that she and her beloved husband are together again."

The 2016 Republican field praised Nancy Reagan's dedication to her husband and country: "Theirs was one of our nation's great love stories and a model of shared devotion to our country," Ohio Gov. John Kasich said in a statement. Texas Sen. Ted Cruz lauded her "deep passion for this nation," while front-runner Donald Trump called Reagan "an amazing woman."

See Page A-7, NANCY REAGAN



Clinton, Sanders pounce on Flint water crisis and each other
Democrats Hillary Clinton and Sen. Bernie Sanders clashed fiercely Sunday over jobs, trade and Wall Street while agreeing that much more must be done to address a 2-year-old water-contamination crisis that has paralyzed Flint, Mich. **Page A-6**

Heroin use seeps into public view
With heroin cheap and widely available across the U.S., users are shooting up as soon as they can — and police are routinely finding drug users, unconscious or dead, in public places. **Page A-4**

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